

Elijah. Part 5: 1 Kings 18. 21-26.

INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth of our series of studies in the life of Elijah, as recorded in 1 Kings 17 and 18, where you and I sit in as spectators to observe how the Lord sets about discrediting the claims made for Ba'al by his followers by demonstrating that He ('Jehovah') – and only He – is the true and 'living' God.

In the first three parts of our series, we have traced how the events of chapter 17 exhibit successfully that Jehovah is the one and only true God. We noted how:

- (i) The *dry brook at Cherith* declares, '**Round 1** to Jehovah!'¹
- (ii) The *well-fed family at Zarephath* proclaims '**Round 2** to Jehovah!'.²
- (iii) The *raising to life of the widow's son* positively thunders, 'And **Round 3** to Jehovah!'³

In part 4, we began to set the stage for the spectacular knockout in 'Round 4', the account of which occupies the main section of chapter 18.

We noted that, although the time had come for a showdown between Jehovah and Ba'al, Elijah said nothing of that to Ahab. He simply instructed the king to gather Israel, together with the Phoenician prophets, to Mount Carmel—which Ahab meekly then proceeded to do.

SCRIPTURE

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God.

And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under.

And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us.

But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.

1 Kings 18. 21-26 (*King James Version*)

ZERO HOUR

Verse 21a. 'Elijah came unto all the people ...'.

The action begins when Elijah draws near to the assembled people.

It isn't difficult to imagine every eye riveted at that moment on the solitary (and distinctively clad⁴) figure and every heart hopeful that the man who, three and a half years previously, had announced his long-range weather forecast—and, at whose word, the heavens had since been as brass—would now announce the end of the crippling drought.

But, if that was what they hoped, they were to be sorely disappointed, for Elijah immediately fires a broadside at the people.

DECISION TIME

Verse 21b. 'And said, How long halt ye between two opinions?'

For too long they have straddled the spiritual fence, attempting to combine the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Ba'al. By *profession*, they still largely regard themselves as the Lord's people, but, by *practice*, they are very much worshippers of Baal.

And so, as Moses⁵ and Joshua⁶ of old, Elijah urges the people to make up their minds and to choose their god: 'If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him'.

It isn't easy to decide exactly what Elijah meant by the word translated 'halt' in the King James Version.

Considering how the word is translated elsewhere in the Old Testament, there are three main possibilities:

(i) A form of the same verb is used to describe the later antics of the prophets of Ba'al—not so much 'upon' their altar as 'about' or 'before' their altar; in all likelihood, this was some form of ritual leaping or dancing.⁷

(ii) The word is used of birds hovering: 'as birds flying ('hovering overhead', that is⁸), the prophet says, 'so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem'.⁹

(iii) The word is rendered 'lame' (twice) in 2 Samuel 4. 4, when describing the effect of the injury to Mephibosheth's feet – where it clearly means 'crippled'.

Separately, scholars inform us that the word translated 'opinions'¹⁰ may well 'denote crutches made out of the limbs of trees'.¹¹

Although I recognise, therefore, that Elijah may be saying something like

(i) '*How long will you dance between two alternatives?*'

or

(ii) '*How long will you flit as a bird from branch to branch?*'¹²

personally, I take Elijah's question to be

(iii) '*How long will you limp and hobble on two crutches?*'¹³

'How long', that is, Elijah asks, 'will you totter and lurch from side to side? How long will you look to both Jehovah and Ba'al for your support, blessing and prosperity. Frankly, the time has come, gentlemen, to make up your mind, and to throw away one crutch or the other'.

In any event, Elijah clearly challenges Israel's lack of decision. The time has come for them to get down off the fence—in one direction or the other!

A DOUBLE-MIND AND A DIVIDED HEART

Additionally, I note that the adjective¹⁴ which comes from the same root as the word translated 'opinions' is rendered 'double-minded' in many English versions of Psalm 119 verse 113: 'I hate *the double-minded*, but I love your law'.¹⁵ Elijah would certainly have signed up to that!

And I am confident that, as someone fired himself by passionate zeal for the Lord (as he is careful to tell the Lord twice in the next chapter¹⁶), Elijah finds the people's double-mindedness and lack of whole-hearted commitment especially distasteful.

And, with that rendering of Psalm 119 verse 113 (about those who are 'double-minded') in our minds, we can hardly fail to link (i) Elijah's condemnation of the people with (ii) the description (given by the New Testament writer who later focuses on Elijah's rain-controlling prayers¹⁷) of the '*double-minded* man ... unstable in all his ways'.¹⁸

The prophet Elijah could certainly have said of the Israel of *his* day, as does the prophet Hosea of the Israel of a *later* day, 'their heart is divided',¹⁹ which is rendered by one commentator as, their heart ... 'was dissimulating, not sincerely devoted to the Lord'.²⁰

And, like it or not, you and I must face the fact that, today as always, God demands the undivided loyalty of His people.

I read some time ago that:

'At a conference between the Northern and Southern American States during the war of 1861-66, representatives of the South explained what concessions they were prepared to make by way of territory, provided that they could secure the independence of the rest. Larger and larger offers were made, but each met with steadfast refusal.

'Finally, Abraham Lincoln placed his hand on that portion of the map which covered all the Southern states, and delivered his ultimatum, '*Gentlemen, this Government must have the whole*'.

'Mr Lincoln knew that the constitution of the United States was at an end if any part, no matter how small, was allowed to be independent of the rest. The constitution allowed for no exceptions. It was either kept in its entirety or it was not kept at all'.²¹

And such is the claim which God makes on all of us. He will not share us with mammon²² ... or anything. Bluntly stated, *His 'Government must have the whole!'*

In Elijah's rulebook, you cannot play for both sides! And so, Elijah demands ...

Verse 21c. 'If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him'.

But what, we may ask, does it mean to 'follow' (literally, to 'go after') a god?

Judges chapter 2 traces the four-stage cycle which characterised the days of the Judges: (i) sin, (ii) servitude, (iii) supplication and (iv) salvation.²³ Verse 19 of that chapter says, 'And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that (the people of Israel) returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in *following* other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them'.

So, there you have it: to 'follow' any god is to 'serve' and to 'bow down' to that god.

DEAFENING SILENCE NUMBER 1

Verse 21d. 'And the people answered him not a word'.

But Elijah's *fervent challenge* rouses no more reaction from the people than Ba'al's prophets' *frenzied cries* later would from their non-existent god—when, repeatedly, there was no answer.²⁴

It has been said that 'they were convicted by their own consciences and so were "speechless"'.²⁵

As I indicated earlier, Joshua had once faced the nation with a rather similar challenge—either 'to serve the Lord' or to 'serve' another 'god'.²⁶ 'Far be it from us', the people had then responded, 'that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods'.²⁷ But, unlike the men of Joshua's day, the men of Elijah's day hold their peace!

If the people had answered, then (i) the subsequent contest by fire would have been unnecessary, (ii) 1 Kings 18 would have been a much shorter chapter and (iii) our current series of studies would have been cut short!

You would think that three and a half years of drought and famine would have convinced the people that Ba'al, the supposed god of rain and fertility, was no god at all, and that Jehovah, in whose name Elijah had declared the coming of the drought, was indeed the only true and living God. But no ... they just stand there like so many dummies and 'answer him not a word'.²⁸

ALONE BUT NOT ALONE

Verse 22a. 'Then said Elijah to the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord'.²⁹

We know (and - if for no other reason, thanks to Obadiah - Elijah knew it³⁰) that, at that very time, there were many other prophets of the Lord in Israel. For, while this 'prophet of the Lord' had been hiding in *Jezebel's* home country, Obadiah had been hiding a hundred 'of the Lord's prophets' in *Ahab's* home country!

Yet, for whatever reason, no other prophet of the Lord is to be seen on Carmel. For practical purposes, therefore, Elijah stands alone that day as God's spokesman.

Further, we note that, when Elijah later says, 'call ye on the name of your gods',³¹ he is addressing, not yet the prophets of Ba'al, as soon afterwards,³² but 'the people' generally.³³

Clearly, no one else *in the whole of Israel* is prepared to take a *public* stand against Jezebel and the wholesale introduction of Ba'al worship—not even from among *the seven thousand* who steadfastly refuse to bow their knees to Ba'al and to kiss his image.³⁴

Elijah is right. Humanly speaking, he does stand alone as the only warrior on Jehovah's side of the battlefield.³⁵

And yet, in another sense, he does *not* stand alone—any more than, over 900 years later, the apostle Paul will stand alone when he appears before Emperor Nero. 'At my first answer ('defence'), he writes, 'no man stood with me, but all men forsook me ... *notwithstanding, the Lord* (who has pledged Himself never to leave or forsake His people³⁶) *stood with me*'.³⁷

No, in that sense, Elijah most certainly isn't standing alone ... and, thank God, neither do we!

THE PROPHETS OF BA'AL

Verse 22b. 'But Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men'.

One man against 450 does not strike me as particularly good odds at the best of times.

Interestingly, these are the very same odds that Gideon's courageous 'three hundred'³⁸ faced when they had first attacked the Midianite raiders (who, then, numbered 135,000 men in total³⁹) several centuries before. And, now, on Carmel, such overwhelming odds are to prove of no greater significance than they did, then, in the valley of Jezreel.⁴⁰

On both occasions, God's presence rather tipped the scales in His servant's favour!

In Geneva, Switzerland, there stands a monument to several of the great Protestant Reformers.⁴¹ At the centre of the monument, by the statue of John Knox, is a French saying⁴² which is attributed to the Scottish Reformer and which (translated into English) reads, '*One man with God is always a majority*'.

That saying would, certainly, have made an apt epitaph to be inscribed on the tombstone of the lone prophet from Gilead who took his stand for and with God on Mount Carmel—except that, of course, *Elijah would never have a tombstone on which to write anything!*⁴³

THE PROPHETS OF ASHERAH

Interestingly, Elijah makes no mention of the four hundred 'prophets of Asherah', who he had specifically included in the instructions which he had given to Ahab.⁴⁴ These prophets are also conspicuously absent from the later narrative, which refers only of 'the prophets of Ba'al'.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, it is possible that the 'prophets of Asherah' were present throughout and, consequently, shared the violent fate of 'the prophets of Ba'al'.⁴⁶ Note, particularly, that:

- (i) Elijah's command to Ahab had been very precise, 'gather to me ... the four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba'al *and the four hundred prophets of Asherah*', following which the Bible text immediately adds, 'So Ahab ... gathered *the prophets* together unto mount Carmel';
- (ii) Elijah did not rebuke Ahab on account of any failure on his part in complying with Elijah's instructions; and
- (iii) Ahab's later report to Jezebel may suggest that Asherah's prophets⁴⁷ were included in the extermination of 'all the prophets'⁴⁸.

As I see it, there are three possibilities:

- (i) on occasions, the expression, 'the prophets of Ba'al', functions as some form of shorthand covering both companies of prophets⁴⁹ and that 'the prophets of Asherah', therefore, died alongside the actual prophets of Ba'al';
- (ii) 'the prophets of Asherah', though present throughout the contest, took 'a back seat' in contrast to the prominent role taken by 'the prophets of Ba'al'⁵⁰ and they, therefore, perished along with them;
- (ii) possibly through Jezebel's influence or instigation, 'the prophets of Asherah' managed to avoid altogether the (to her and them) ominous planned confrontation and that they, therefore, escaped from execution.⁵¹

Personally, I favour possibility (ii) but I am in no position to be dogmatic.

But returning to what we do know, Elijah boldly proposes that the future direction of Israel's faith and worship be submitted to trial 'by fire'.

WHY 'BY FIRE'?

Verses 23-24a. 'Let them therefore give us two bullocks ... and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God'.

But why 'by *fire*'?

Matthew Henry offers an interesting suggestion: 'Elijah does not say, "The God that answers by water" (though that was the thing the country needed), but "that answers by fire, let him be God"; because the atonement was to be made by sacrifice, before the judgment could be removed in mercy'.⁵²

I agree with Mr Henry that:

(i) fire from God indicates His acceptance of the sacrifice;

(ii) the fact that the fire falls on and consumes the burnt offering⁵³ and not the people (who had drawn near to Elijah and the altar⁵⁴) proves, indeed, that God is not only *great* but is *gracious*.

(iii) it is possible to regard Elijah's accepted burnt offering on the altar at Carmel as, in some sense, making atonement ... much as David's offering of burnt offerings upon the altar at Ornan's threshing floor (when the Lord '*answered him* from heaven *by fire* upon the altar of burnt offering'⁵⁵) once served to deliver the people of Israel from God's judgment in his day.⁵⁶

But, surely, there is *far more to the 'answer by fire' than that*.

BA'AL IN HIS ELEMENT

Over the past three and a half years, Elijah, as Jehovah's servant, has done a first-class job of discrediting the myth that Ba'al ruled the clouds and the rainfall. And, now, on Carmel, he sets out to prove that Ba'al exercises no more power over fire than he does over rain.

And the 'fire' test which Elijah proposes is more than fair for Elijah plays intentionally to what was reckoned to be Ba'al's strength.

According to the prevailing pagan mythology, Ba'al was 'the storm God ... depicted with lightning bolts in his hand and spoken of in the texts as flashing forth with fire or lightning. In one text, fire is even used by Ba'al as a means of constructing his house. Baal was therefore considered by his worshipers as the lord of fire',⁵⁷

The so-called 'Ba'al Epic' puts into the mouth of Asherah the words, 'Lo, it is the time of his rain. Ba'al ... sounds his voice from the clouds. He flashes lightning to the earth'. Another pagan text says of Ba'al, 'Seven lightning bolts he casts ... he brandishes a spear of lightning'.⁵⁸

And, again, the myth, 'Ba'al battles Môt', addresses Ba'al with the words, 'Mightiest Ba'al ... take your clouds, your winds, your thunder-bolts'.⁵⁹

I am sure you have got the message ... as the god of fire, lightning and thunderbolts, Ba'al should be in his 'element', ahem!

After all, 'answering by fire' is, supposedly, just up Ba'al's street.⁶⁰

In passing, I note that Elijah's words, 'call ye on the name of your gods', in verse 24, are addressed, not to 'the prophets of Ba'al' (as the same words are in verse 25) but to 'the people'. Given that 'the people' are, by practice, the worshippers of Ba'al, Elijah doesn't think twice about associating them with Ba'al's prophets.⁶¹

Verse 24b. 'And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken'.

In the light of Ba'al's reputation as 'the god of fire, lightning and thunderbolts', the people can hardly object to Elijah's proposal and so they respond, 'Well spoken'.⁶²

ROUND 4 BEGINS

Verse 25a. 'And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many'.

FAVOURABLE ODDS

In every way, the rules which Elijah draws up for the contest are fair and above board.

More than that, Elijah sees to it that all the odds were stacked in favour of Ba'al's prophets:

(i) As we noted previously, the contest is to be fought 'on their home ground'.⁶³

(ii) As noted above, the chosen 'fire' trial plays to their god's supposed strength.

(iii) Not only do the Ba'al team have 450 men on the field with only one man in the other team but that 'one man' insists that the Ba'al team go 'first'⁶⁴ ... giving the Ba'al team the advantage of pleading for fire during the most promising part of the day,⁶⁵ when the sun was at its zenith and its rays at their hottest ('from morning until noon'⁶⁶).

(iv) Elijah not only yields the precedence to the Ba'al team but also gives them the choice of bullock. It has been suggested that 'he allows the Ba'al prophets complete control over the sacrificial animals.

They supply them and they have first choice⁶⁷ ... This arrangement favours the Ba'al prophets, of course, because there is nothing to prevent them from providing one worthy and one unworthy animal and leaving the imperfect one to Elijah'.⁶⁸

There can be no doubt that, from Elijah's point of view, the more favourable the circumstances enjoyed by Ba'al's prophets, the more decisive will be their defeat.

Elijah knows that, in letting the opposition go first, their failure (about which he entertains not one moment's doubt) will make the bigger impression upon the people.

For, if he goes first himself and God then answers by fire (as Elijah is confident that He will), there will be no way for Elijah to persuade Ahab or the people—or Jezebel, for that matter—that the prophets of Ba'al wouldn't have been equally successful if they had been given the chance.⁶⁹

True, Ahab and others may then entertain their suspicions privately about that but for Elijah now to put the other team 'into bat first' is a masterstroke. For, when Ahab and the people witness first-hand both (i) the exposure of the prophets of Ba'al as the fakes which they are and (ii) the fire come from heaven in response to Elijah's prayer, they will be left in no doubt whose God was the real God.

NO CHEATING BUT PLENTY OF CHANTING

Verse 25b. 'And call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under'.

In passing, I note that this is the third time that Elijah uses the words, 'put no fire under'.⁷⁰ There is to be no cheating or sleight of hand—by either party. The true God is the one who proves Himself able to light His own bonfire!⁷¹

Verse 26a. 'And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it'.

When addressing the people previously, Elijah had stipulated that the prophets of Ba'al were to be given the choice of bullock: '*let them choose* one bullock for themselves'.⁷² But we now read that 'they *took* the bullock *which was given them*'.⁷³ This must mean either that (i) that they are now given the bullock which they had selected earlier or (ii) for some reason, they decline the offer.⁷⁴

Although I incline to the first interpretation, it matters very little and it certainly has no effect on the outcome!

Verse 26b. 'And called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us'.

The prophets of Ba'al repeat their monotonous chant, 'O Ba'al, hear ('answer') us', 'from morning even until noon'. This period extends far longer than the two hours during which the townsfolk of Ephesus cried, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians' ('that is; 'Artemis of the Ephesians', allegedly an updated version of 'Asherah'⁷⁵) over nine centuries later.⁷⁶

I think we can assume that all these prophets (along with many others) had been invoking Ba'al regularly over the past three and a half years ... and Ba'al hadn't performed at all well, to say the least. But their pleas had then been for water. Perhaps they are now hoping for greater success when it comes to lightning bolts!

DEAFENING SILENCE NUMBER 2

Verse 26c. 'But there was no voice, nor any that answered'.

It is important to note what the scripture does *not* say.

It does *not* say, 'But Ba'al didn't speak or answer'. That would have been to acknowledge that Ba'al lived but that, for some reason, he failed to respond to the cries of his prophets.

Whereas, by wording the text as He has, the Holy Spirit makes it clear that Ba'al *had no real existence* at all. There was neither voice nor answer for the simple reason that there was no-one to speak or to respond.⁷⁷

As I emphasise towards the close of Part 3, 'Ba'al' was only a myth—a mere figment of man's fertile and filthy imagination.⁷⁸

I don't doubt that many of the people believed that the clash between Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al on Carmel represented a cosmic struggle between two rival – and real – deities. But *they were wrong!* There was – and there is – only one God⁷⁹ ... and any other object of worship is but an idol.

SHALL WE DANCE?

Verse 26d. ‘And they leaped upon the altar which was made’.

I do not know the origin of the altar used by Ba'al's prophets.

Although the translators of the Greek Old Testament speculated that the altar had been built by the prophets themselves (‘the altar which *they* had made’⁸⁰), no mention is made in the Hebrew text of their having ‘repaired’ or ‘built’ their altar⁸¹— as Elijah later did his.⁸²

One commentator suggests, ‘Perhaps that indicates that Mount Carmel was already being used for Ba'al worship and the altar was ready’.⁸³ Certainly, this would be consistent with Carmel being ‘used as a site sacred to Ba'al’,⁸⁴ providing, therefore, an existing altar of Ba'al within easy reach.

‘And they leaped⁸⁵ upon (better, ‘about’⁸⁶ or ‘before’) the altar’. This is most likely a reference to some form of ritual leaping or dancing. In all probability, the 450 prophets of Ba'al ‘danced around the altar’.⁸⁷

On the birthday of Herod Antipas, ‘the daughter of Herodias (whom we know from non-biblical sources to be ‘Salome’ by name⁸⁸) *danced*’ before the assembled guests. She so pleased Herod that ‘he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask’.⁸⁹

I think we can assume that, for their part, ‘the prophets of Ba'al’ hope, by means of *their dancing*, to please, not a human ruler such as Herod Antipas, but their god, Ba'al, and, thereby, to secure from him that which they want most—namely, an answer ‘by fire’.⁹⁰

Don't tell them but, frankly, *the prophets of Ba'al stand more chance of being struck by real lightning!*

To be continued.

Notes

¹ 1 Kings 17. 1, 7.

² 1 Kings 17. 16.

³ 1 Kings 17. 22.

⁴ A 'hairy' garment (probably, of sheep-skin, goat-skin or coarse camel-hair) and a leather girdle (as opposed to an ordinary girdle of cotton or linen), 2 Kings 1. 8; cf. Zech. 13. 4; Matt. 3. 4.

⁵ Exod. 32. 26.

⁶ Josh. 24. 14-15.

⁷ 1 Kings 18. 26. See the comments on verse 26d below.

⁸ 'Like birds hovering overhead', G. L. Klein, '*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*', Volume 3, page 353 (number 6414).

⁹ Isa. 31. 5.

¹⁰ The Hebrew noun, שְׂתִי.

¹¹ See, for example, E. C. Hostetter, '*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*', Volume 3, page 275 (number 6188). See also, 'on two tree branches', J. T. Walsh, '*1 Kings: Berit Olam*', page 245.

¹² 'A bird hopping among the branches', John Gray, '*I and II Kings*', page 396.

¹³ 'The figure may be of a cripple making his uneasy way *on two crutches*', C. G. Martin, '*1 and 2 Kings*', comment on 1 Kings 18. 21.

'How long will you hobble *on two crutches*', John Gray, *ibid.* page 388.

¹⁴ The Hebrew adjective, סַעֲפִים.

¹⁵ For example, ESV, NRSV, NASB and NKJV; similarly, RV, RSV, JND and NIV.

¹⁶ 1 Kings 19. 10, 14.

¹⁷ James 5. 17-18.

¹⁸ James 1. 8.

¹⁹ Hosea 10. 2.

²⁰ C. F. Keil, '*Commentary on the Old Testament by Keil and Delitzsch*', Volume X, page 128.

²¹ A. Plummer, '*The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude*', page 235 (amended very slightly).

²² Matt. 6. 34; Luke 16. 13. 'This truth is put in language of unmistakable clearness by lips that cannot err, "No man can serve two masters"', D. Merson, '*The Bible Illustrator*', comment on 1 Kings 18. 21.

²³ Judg. 2. 11-19.

²⁴ 1 Kings 18. 26, 29.

²⁵ J. Hammond, '*1 Kings: The Pulpit Commentary*', Volume 5, page 421, with reference to Matt. 22. 12; cf. Jer. 2. 26.

²⁶ Joshua 24. 14-15.

²⁷ Joshua 24. 16 NKJV.

²⁸ It would be hard to miss seeing the word 'answer' as one of the key words of the section. When the people '*answered not*', v. 21, Elijah proposes that 'the God that *answers* by fire, He is God', to which 'the people *answered* ... It is well spoken', v. 24. Then the prophets of Ba'al cry out from morning to noon, 'O Ba'al, hear us' ('*answer* us', the same word), v. 26, and when they call to Ba'al, no one '*answers*', vv. 26, 29. And, finally, Elijah closes his prayer, 'Hear me ('*answer* me', the same word again), O Lord, hear me ('*answer* me')', v. 37. Eight occurrences of the word in the space of just seventeen verses isn't bad going!

In one sense, therefore, the whole section is dominated by *the question of who will answer and who will not*.

²⁹ Literally, 'I, I am left (the same word Elijah uses later in prayer, 1 Kings 19. 10, 14), a prophet of the Lord, I alone'.

³⁰ 1 Kings 18. 13.

³¹ 1 Kings 18. 24.

³² 1 Kings 18. 25.

³³ 1 Kings 18. 22.

³⁴ 1 Kings 19. 18; Rom. 11. 4. It could be said that Jezebel's regime was marked by '*Ba'al-kissing and prophet-killing*'!

³⁵ Not that being in the minority has ever been a problem if God has been on one's side.

Reflect on the words (i) of *Jonathan* ('there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few', 1 Sam. 14. 5) and (ii) of *Asa* ('it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go', 2 Chron. 14. 11).

The Lord's 'power has never depended on how many cheerleaders He has', D. R. Davis, '*The Wisdom and the Folly; an Exposition of 1 Kings*', page 237.

³⁶ Heb. 13. 5.

³⁷ 2 Tim. 4. 16-17.

³⁸ Judg. 7. 6-8, 16, 22; 8. 4.

³⁹ Judg. 8. 10.

⁴⁰ Judg. 6. 33; 7. 1, 8, 12, 22-25.

⁴¹ 'The International Monument to the Reformation'. Four 5-metre-tall statues of Calvinism's main advocates are depicted at the centre of the Monument.

⁴² 'Un homme avec Dieu est toujours dans la majorite'.

⁴³ 2 Kings 2. 11.

⁴⁴ 1 Kings 18. 19.

⁴⁵ 1 Kings 18. 25, 40.

⁴⁶ 'Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there', 1 Kings 18. 40.

⁴⁷ Who enjoyed close ties to Jezebel: 'which eat at Jezebel's table', 1 Kings 18. 19.

⁴⁸ 'Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword', 1 Kings 19. 1.

⁴⁹ This would work for two such occasions, 1 Kings 18. 25, 40. But there can be no question of 'shorthand' in verse 22: 'Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but *Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men*'. And, as Elijah's point rests on the stark imbalance between himself (a single individual) and the number of his opponents, he had no reason to understate the numeral size of the opposition.

⁵⁰ Hence, Elijah's drawing attention only to the number of 'the prophets of Ba'al'.

'400 more, *their supporters or seconds*', Matthew Henry, '*An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*', 1706, Volume II, comments on 1 Kings 18. 22.

- ⁵¹ 'The natural inference is that either Jezebel had forbidden their presence or that they shrank from the ordeal', J. Hammond, *ibid.*, page 422.
- ⁵² Matthew Henry, *ibid.*, comments on 1 Kings 18. 23-24.
- ⁵³ 1 Kings 18. 38.
- ⁵⁴ 1 Kings 18. 30, 36.
- ⁵⁵ 1 Chron. 21. 26.
- ⁵⁶ 2 Sam. 24. 25; 1 Chron. 21. 27.
- ⁵⁷ C. S. Keener, '*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*', page 378.
- ⁵⁸ 'The Ugaritic myths depict Ba'al as a mighty warrior-king who controls the elements of the storm ... The myths speak of Ba'al appointing a time "for the sounding of his voice in the clouds, for him to release (his) lightnings on the earth". Another text describes Baal in the following manner: "Seven lightning bolts he casts, eight magazines of thunder, he brandishes a spear of lightning"', Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., '*The Polemic against Baalism in Israel's Early History and Literature*', *Bibliotheca Sacra* (BSac—V151 #603—Jul 94), page 270.
- ⁵⁹ J. C. L. Gibson, '*Canaanite Myths and Legends*', page 72 (Mr Gibson's quotation is taken from '*Ba'al battles Mot*', column v). The same quotation appears in Humberto Casanova, '*Imagining God: Myth and Metaphor*', page 40.
- ⁶⁰ In words attributed to Mark Twain, 'Thunder is good, thunder is impressive; but it is lightning that does the work'.
- ⁶¹ 'Instead of talking about the Baal prophets, "*they will call on the name of their god*", he says to the people themselves, "*you call on the name of your god*". Since Yahweh demands choice, as long as the people are unwilling to make a choice between Yahweh and Baal, they are in effect siding with Ba'al', J. T. Walsh, *ibid.*, page 246.
- ⁶² 'Shouted their approval' is the paraphrase of the close of verse 24 in the Good News Bible.
- ⁶³ See the comments on verse 20 towards the close of Part 4.
- ⁶⁴ 'The Ba'al prophets have a definite advantage in the contest, since it gives Ba'al the chance for a pre-emptive strike, so to speak', J. T. Walsh, *ibid.*, page 247.
- ⁶⁵ 'Elijah allowed them the best part of a day', H. L. Ellison, '*I and II Kings: The New Bible Commentary*', IVP, page 359.
- ⁶⁶ 1 Kings 18. 26b.
- ⁶⁷ 'Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves', 1 Kings 18. 22-23a.
- ⁶⁸ J. T. Walsh, *ibid.*, page 246. Personally, I am not so sure about the 'supply' of the bullocks. [Technical note: I think it likely that the expression, '*Let them therefore give us two bullocks*' is an instance where the third person active is used impersonally with a passive sense; that is, that the text denotes no more than, '*let us be given two bullocks*'. Compare, by way of another example, 'God said unto him, Thou fool, this night *they shall require* thy soul of thee', Luke 12. 20, literal translation, which denotes, 'thy soul *shall be required*'.)]
- ⁶⁹ 'Elijah shrewdly lets the Ba'al prophets sacrifice first, lest (Jehovah's) dramatic response forestall the Ba'al sacrifice. In that scenario the people might in future wonder if Ba'al may have acted in similar power. Elijah ensures an order of events that will demonstrate the greatest display of Ba'al's impotence and (Jehovah's) power', L. M. Wray Beal, '*1 & 2 Kings: Apollos Old Testament Commentary*', page 244. 'He is anxious that their inability shall be fully manifested before he shows his own power', G. Rawlinson, '*An Explanatory and Critical Commentary and a Revision of the Translation, by Bishops and Other Clergy of the Anglican Church*', edited by F. C. Cook, Volume II, page 592.
- ⁷⁰ Earlier, Elijah uses the expression twice when addressing the people, 1 Kings 18. 23.
- ⁷¹ 'The true God was the one who provided His own fire to burn the sacrifice', H. L. Ellison, *ibid.*, page 359.
- ⁷² 1 Kings 18. 23.

⁷³ [Technical note: The Hebrew reads, 'which he (or one) gave them', a clear case where the third person active is used impersonally with a passive sense].

⁷⁴ The view taken by J. Hammond, *ibid.*, page 423: 'they declined to choose'.

⁷⁵ 'Artemis, the goddess of childbirth and fertility, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love, continued the Asherah cults under a new name', R. V. Laan, '*Fertility Cults of Canaan*'.

⁷⁶ Acts 19. 34. 'There were two goddesses named Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Latin) that Gentiles worshipped in the Roman Empire at this time. One was the goddess of the hunt, usually pictured as a young woman carrying a hunting bow. The other was a fertility goddess portrayed as a woman with many breasts. The latter was the one especially venerated in Ephesus', Thomas Constable, '*Expository Notes on the Bible*', comments on Acts 19. 24.

'The Ephesian Artemis was the personification of the fruitful and nurturing powers of nature', J. R. Lumby, '*The Acts of the Apostles: The Cambridge Greek Testament*', page 341.

⁷⁷ 'The narrator does not say, "Baal did not answer", as if Baal exists and can answer but for some reason remains silent. By phrasing the sentence in terms of absence ("There is no") ... the narrator hints at Baal's nonentity ... The sequence "no voice, no answerer" implies a causal relationship: there is no voice because there is no one to answer when Baal is invoked'. J. T. Walsh, *ibid.*, page 248.

⁷⁸ The full quotations is: 'We need to be clear that Ba'al wasn't some inferior god, some lesser god, some second-rate god. Certainly not. Ba'al wasn't any kind of god! Ba'al was only a myth, a fake, a mere figment of the imagination of a vile and degraded pagan world—no more real than Sherlock Holmes, than Hercule Poirot ... or than Winnie the Pooh!'.

⁷⁹ 1 Tim. 2. 5; cf. Isa. 44. 6.

⁸⁰ The actual words are, 'ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, οὗ ἐποίησαν', 1 Kings 18. 26 (Greek Old Testament).

⁸¹ Literally translated, the Hebrew text speaks of '*the altar which one had made*', C. F. Keil, *ibid.*, page 246.

⁸² 'He repaired the altar ... he built an altar', 1 Kings 18. 30, 32.

⁸³ Roger Hahn, '*1 and 2 Kings: CRI*', comments on 1 Kings 18. 26.

⁸⁴ For further detail, see Note 60 to Part 4.

⁸⁵ The same word as that translated 'halt' in verse 21.

⁸⁶ So RV, NASB and JND.

⁸⁷ The NIV rendering.

⁸⁸ Salome was Herodias' daughter by her previous marriage to Philip and was then between 12 and 14 years old; see Harold W. Hoehner, '*Herod Antipas*', pages 151-156.

⁸⁹ Matt. 14. 6-7.

⁹⁰ 1 Kings 18. 24.